

EXPECTED PROOF OF PROFESSED LOVE

NO. 1522

A SERMON
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“Show you...the proof of your love.”
2 Corinthians 8:24.

IN every believer's heart there is love to God. He cannot else be a child of God. In every Christian's soul there is love to Jesus Christ. How could he be a Christian otherwise? As a consequence of this, in every Christian's bosom there is a love to the brotherhood—“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” In every Christian's breast there is also a love to all mankind. He practices that second great commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The spirit of God has cast out the demon of selfishness, and in proportion as that is the case the man possesses the mind of Christ, which is love. As all the law is fulfilled in one word, which is “love,” so the outcome of our holy faith is also contained in that one word, “love.” Oh that we were saturated with it!

Where there is true love in the heart it becomes a working principle. It does not lie dormant, but it works—works abundantly. It is a vital principle, and where there is life there is movement, and a measure of activity. It is a principle that grows, and out of its growth there comes fruit. For these reasons, and in these ways, true believers give sure proofs of the love that is in their hearts.

I wish to speak to you, at this time, by answering four questions.

I. First, WHAT IS THE EXCELLENCE OF THIS LOVE that we should be so anxious to prove it?

This Christian love must have some great worth about it or else we should not be exhorted by the apostle once and again to prove that we have it.

First remember that true love to God and the saints in the Christian heart is *divine in its origin*. We should never have loved God if He had not first loved us, and unless His Holy Spirit had turned the stream of our affections in that direction, we should have run away from God and have hated God, but we should neither have loved Him nor His people. It is the nature of the seed of the serpent to hate the seed of the woman, and as long as we were under condemnation and wrath, and in our natural estate, we were on the serpent's side, and we warred against that which is good. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” If, therefore, we have even a spark of love to God, God must have given it to us. It is, therefore, a precious thing because it is of God, and we ought to take heed that we assuredly possess it, and we also should endeavor to live so that others may be convinced that this divine principle rules our spirits.

As it is divine in its origin, so it is *surpassing in its energy*, for true love to God exceeds all other love. Does not Christ tell us that—that a man must love Him better than father or mother, or the dearest relative he has, or else he does not love Him at all? Christ will not be put off with the leavings of our heart. He must have our whole heart. All human affections, which are natural and proper, are to be held in subservience to this grand and master passion which is to set our soul on a blaze—love to God in Christ Jesus. He loves not Christ at all who does not love Him first and best. This affection, like Aaron's rod, must swallow up all others, and our whole heart must belong to the Lord our God.

We must take care that we give proof of an affection which is so surpassing in its energy, for surely if it has such force, it must produce its own proof. If it were some minor passion—some little narrow jet of flame that might light up a corner of our being, we might not be so particular about it, but if it is to fire our entire manhood it must produce some effect or else we may well question whether we possess it.

This love is absolutely *vital in its necessity*. If it can be proved that a man does not love God, love Christ, and love His people, then the life of God does not dwell in him. Life and love are two words

singularly alike, and when we get to the bottom and radical principle of the spiritual nature, we perceive that they are singularly bound up together insomuch that “He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.” These are some of the apostle John’s great little words, which, in their miniature form, contain whole worlds of meaning.

Beloved, we must love God or else we are not in Christ. Hence the importance that the proofs of our love should be very distinct and unmistakable. We should make our calling and election sure, and those things never can be sure unless we have abundant proofs of our love. It is vital in its necessity.

However great that love becomes, and I have spoken of it as rising to a superlative degree, it is *warranted by the facts of the case*. Love to God—I will not spend a word in justifying it. Love to Christ—how can it be needful to commend it to you?

*“Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands our soul, our life, our all.”*

And it shall have it, too. Do you not say so, my brethren? Do you not yield to this soft yet mighty bond—soft as silk, yet strong as iron? It holds us fast, we cannot escape from it. Not love Christ? Not love His people? Not love the world of sinners lost? Oh! sirs, surely we were of all creatures the most brutish if we were to dispute the necessity of love. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich.” Go and love Jesus Christ till men call you a fanatic. Go and love Him till you give all your goods to feed the poor. Go and love Him till you lie in a prison till the moss grows on your eyelids. Go and love Him till you burn to ashes at the stake, and you have not loved Him one whit more than He deserves. O our best Beloved, Your deservings warrant us in permitting our zeal for You to eat us up, and eaten up we would be for Your glory’s sake!

This love to Christ has been in all ages very *eminent in its achievements*. Wherever love reigns in a Christian, it makes him strong. Faith laughs at impossibilities and cries, “It must be done,” but love performs the deed, for “faith works by love.” Love is the right hand of faith. What have not men done out of love to Christ? Truly, the time would fail me to tell of its exploits. What you shall do, dear sister, if you become full of love to Jesus, will astonish you, and what you shall do, dear brother, if the love of Christ burns through your soul, will far exceed what you have dreamed of as yet.

Oh! for more love. Let the martyrs tell you what poor suffering flesh and blood can do when love strengthens it. Let holy women that have debated and disputed, and bled and died for Christ, and in all their timidity and weakness made brave as lions for Christ, tell what love has done. Let the walls of the Coliseum at Rome, let the arenas of hundreds of amphitheaters tell how bravely men have played the man, how bravely women have met death for Christ’s sake. All that the church wants is the Holy Ghost to baptize her into the love of Christ, and nothing will be impossible to her.

Thus have I tried to commend this love, and surely we ought to be able to prove that we have it. If we have any question as to whether we have it or not, let us find no rest day or night till the grand debate is ended. We must love Christ or perish. Oh! by the certainty that His saints shall see Him face to face and be like Him, let us rise to something nobler in the form of love to Him than we have ever reached as yet.

This is the love which we are to give proof of.

II. Secondly, WHAT IS THIS PROOF?

The text says, “Show you to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love.” What proof shall we show?

There are so many forms of action which would prove love to Christ that I cannot possibly go through them all, especially as each person, I believe, will give a different proof of his love. There is (to use a difficult word) an idiosyncrasy about each believer. He is a man by himself, and his love, if it is genuine, will take a form peculiar to himself in the proof which it gives. Certain proofs look *towards*

God and the Lord Jesus. If you love Him, you will keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous. If you love Him, you will seek to honor Him—to spread the savor of His glorious name. If you love God in Christ Jesus, you will be anxious to extend His rule over the hearts of men. If you love God, you will long for communion with Him, you will not be satisfied to live for days without speaking with Him. If you love Him, you will grieve yourself when you grieve Him, your heart will smite you when you have gone astray. If you love God, you will long to be like Him, you will strive after holiness. If you love God, He will reign over you, Christ will be your King, your mind will be under subjection to Him, your thoughts will be guided by Him, your opinions will be taken from His Word, your whole life will be seasoned by His Spirit which dwells in you. Do you not see that there are hundreds of ways in which you can show proof of your love towards God? Oh, that we may not be found wanting in any of these things!

We may show this love, in the next place, *towards God's ministers.* I cannot help mentioning them because the apostle so distinctly in this chapter speaks of himself and his brethren. And one special way of showing it is this—if they speak well of you, do not let them have cause to retract their holy boasting, and have to say with tears “I was deceived in these people.”

If any have brought you to Christ, be an honor to them and to the Gospel that they preach, because, dear friends, the world turns round, and however retired a minister may be, yet worldlings are sure to throw the inconsistencies of his people in his teeth. They say, “That is one of So-and-so's people, see how he acts,” and our ministry is hindered and our hearts are grieved whenever those who profess to have been brought to Christ walk unworthily. Show us a proof of the love you often express to us as your servants in Christ Jesus, by endeavoring so to walk that when we give in our account we may do it with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable to you.

Next, show proofs of your love *in reference to God's people.* How can that be done? Some of you need to have this thing gone over with you because you have evidently forgotten it. If you are God's servants you love His people, and the first proof you should give is to go and join with them. Say, “Where the list of their names is kept I will count it an honor to have my name enrolled.” Certain of you say, “I should count it an honor, but I have hardly the courage to come forward.” What! Have I been sitting these various days to see the timid ones, and have you not all come yet?

We will have another time for you, then, and try if we cannot get you right, for really we are not so frightful as you think we are, and you need not be timid about telling to a poor servant of Jesus Christ that you really love the name of his Master. He will be glad, and so will you be. Nay, but you say you are half afraid of yourself. I wish you were altogether afraid of yourself. The more afraid of yourself the better, for you are good for nothing in yourself.

But do not be afraid of trusting yourself with Jesus, and when you have so done then the very next thing is to become identified with the visible church of Christ. If you say, “I love the brethren,” the brethren may turn round and say, “Give us a proof of your love. Cast in your lot with us.” Do as she did who, though she had been a heathen, nevertheless clung to one who worshipped the true God and said, “Whither you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge: your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”

But when you have joined the church, then surely you should show a proof of your love by a hearty fellowship with the saints. We do not want you to put your name in the book and to be a professor, and then sit in one of those pews up in the corner and come in and go out and never speak to anybody. I meet even now with some who say, “I have been for months at the Tabernacle, and nobody ever spoke to me.” Well, I know that there are so many earnest Christians on the watch here to speak with strangers that if you have not been spoken to it must be your own fault. Perhaps you are some dreadfully stiff body, and you have frightened them. I do not know, but it may be so. There are some who look as if they said, “Do not come near me. I do not want any questions asked me.”

We have some brethren and sisters who will break through your stiffness though, I dare say, but if it really is so, I am very sorry for it, and it need not be so any longer. Speak to somebody at this very

service. I do not dislike to hear a low hum of godly conversation before service begins, though some people think it horrible, neither do I deprecate a little lingering upon the steps and around the building, you are holding fellowship one with another, and I like that it should be so, for we do not meet too often. It is no desecration of the Sabbath or of the place of worship for Christian people to speak with one another to edification. When you join the church join it in earnest and converse much with the people of God, and by your hearty zeal show them a proof of your love.

And then unite with them in all their service. The school wants Sunday school teachers. You love Christ, you say, and you love the young, show us a proof of your love. Come and help in that good work. There is something or other that you can do for Jesus, and for His church, do it, and thus show us a proof of your love.

Show the proof of your love by comforting the saints in affliction, by helping them as much as you can when they are in need, by defending their good name whenever you hear them railed at, by suffering nobody to speak against them falsely when you are by. Stand up for them.

Show them the proof of your love by bearing with their infirmities. The church is not perfect, and if it were it would not be perfect after you had joined it. You who have so many infirmities yourself should patiently bear with the infirmities of others. If the saints are not all you would like them to be, remember, nevertheless, that they are dear to the heart of Christ, and He, perhaps, sees in them beauties which you would see too, if you had more beauties yourself.

Perhaps your power to find fault arises from your having so many faults yourself, and if you were more sanctified, and more like Christ, you would fix your eye as well upon the beauties of their character as upon their defects. Show us the proof of your love. I am not speaking as though I did not see among you abundant proofs of your love, but I am speaking to some who perhaps, as yet, have never realized their position of privilege in reference to Christ and to His people, and they have never let their hearts go out as they should go out towards those whom Christ has purchased with His precious blood.

Show us the proof of your love *to the ungodly* too—to this great city of four millions. Show us the proof of your love by trying to snatch the firebrands from the flame. Be up and doing. Stand at the street corners, if you can, and preach Jesus Christ. Scatter the printed Gospel in every room to which you have access. Talk of Christ to your work people. Speak of Him to your companions. Endeavor to spread this potent all-heal, this cure for all manner of spiritual diseases, for otherwise, talk as you may, profess as you may, we shall have to say to you, “Show us the proof of your love.”

I have only given you a sort of charcoal sketch of what might be the proof of your love, I have not drawn the picture or laid on the colors. Think, dear friends, how you can give such proof at once.

III. But now, in the third place, WHY IS THIS PROOF CALLED FOR?

Somebody says, “Why am I called upon to prove my love?” Do not grieve even if I press it very hard upon you, for your case will be something like that of Simon Peter when he too was pressed exceedingly.

Peter was grieved when his Master said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?” Now the Lord did not ask it because He doubted him, for He knew Peter’s heart. Peter’s appeal was a true one, “You know all things. You know that I love you.” Do not therefore resent it, and say, “Why should I prove my love?” No, but just listen. *True love always longs to prove itself.* It does not need a command to do it. It is waiting for an opportunity. It is so with your domestic life. You know that it is so. I need not give instances. What a pleasure it is to show love to those we love!

In a far higher degree, what a delight it is to a Christian to do something for Jesus! If you have never done anything distinctly for Jesus, what sort of a child of God can you be? I love my Master’s service, and I can truly say that I think that I would do anything for His people, but I am not quite so sure about that as I am about the feeling that I would do anything *for Him*. When I get a hold of something that is distinctly and undividedly for my Lord’s glory, I am glad to do it. To break an alabaster box of ointment upon His head is a rich delight, truly it might have been given to the poor and have blessed the poor, but

Jesus Himself is best. "It is a waste," somebody murmurs. Yes, yes, but to be wasteful for Christ is the noblest economy.

O hearts that love your Lord, never count the silver when you are spending for Jesus! Break the box! Pour out the ointment! The room will be filled with the perfume, and it will not be wasted. Even if there were no nostrils to smell it, if Jesus alone had the refreshment of it, it would be all the better. I like to enter the glade of a forest where there are spots unseen of eye of man, and thickets of brake through which nobody but the red deer has ever passed. I delight to sit down by a little rippling brook upon a bank of thyme undesecrated by human foot and think, "This is God's garden, and every leaf waves for Him."

How dare the poet say that flowers which were born to blush unseen are wasting their fragrance on the desert air? Why, they are flowering for God, and He delights in them, and they are just the best used flowers in the world. Oh to be just such a flower as that at times, and to feel that you have got away—away from the gardens where men may come and praise or dispraise, and offer mercenary prizes for flowers and fruits—away where God sees you and delights in you. We should try to work for Jesus only. Proof is called for, not because Jesus doubts, but because He loves to please us by giving us opportunities of proving our love.

But one reason why we are called upon to prove our love is *that it may become a blessing to other people*. The Corinthians were to prove their love because the poor folks at Jerusalem were starving. It would be of no use for the Corinthians to sing a hymn about charity while the poor saints at Jerusalem had not a loaf to eat. No, they must prove their love that it might be a benefit to others, and that the influence of that love might spread to others, because the apostle said, "If you Corinthians do not discharge your promise, those people at Macedonia will throw it in my teeth, and do nothing themselves, and therefore, for the sake of the churches in Macedonia, you must be liberal."

So, beloved, oftentimes one man, by serving his Master well, stirs up a whole regiment of other Christians, who become ashamed to be doing so little. I may preach a great many sermons, brethren, but they will do very little good compared with what your sermons will do, if, as a church, you live up to the mark as Christians. If, in holy love, and concord, and every grace, you abound, other churches will say, "Look at this church." Oh that you may be such saints that others may be encouraged in their work for Christ by you, that is why you are asked to prove your love.

You are asked to prove your love, for *it is reasonable that you should do so*. God did not love you and keep it to Himself and say, "My name is love, but I will do nothing." No, He gave His Son from His bosom, His only Son, and that Son He gave to die. God is practical. That which He feels, He does; that which He speaks is done. We have many idle words, but the word and mind of God come out in deeds of grace. Is it not right, therefore, that we should give practical proof of our love?

IV. Time fails me or I would have dwelt on the fourth point, namely, WHO IT IS THAT CALLS FOR THIS PROOF OF OUR LOVE?

I will leave out everybody else but one and say, it is *your Lord*, your own dying, living Savior who says, "Show me the proof of your love." I will tell you how He is saying it. Affliction has come into your house. There is a dear one dead, and Jesus says, "Now will you kick against me, or will you yield me your treasure? Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these dear ones? If so, you will part with them and not complain." "Mary, do you love me better than mother, or sister, or friend? If so, you will bless me when I take them away. Now is your time, show me the proof of your love by bowing before my chastening, and love me still." Our Lord only takes from us what He gave to us, let us, therefore, bless His name. Bereaved one, that may be the proof of love to which He is calling *you*.

Perhaps you have had a difference lately with one to whom you ought to be united in friendship, and now your conscience is saying, "Christians ought to live in peace and love." But Satan is saying "You were not to blame. Do not humble yourself before such a proud person as your opponent." But my Lord and Master says to you, "Show Me the proof of your love. Forgive him for My sake even to seventy times seven, and if you have wronged him confess the wrong, and humble yourself for My sake.

Because I washed My disciples' feet, show Me the proof of your love by washing one another's feet." Attend to that admonition, I pray you.

But possibly there are some here who have had in their minds the project of doing something unusual for Jesus, or the church, or the poor, or for missions to the heathen. Satan has said, "You must not give so much as that." Jesus says, "I have prospered you, when others have failed in business I have taken care of you. Show Me the proof of your love." Will you not hear His call? Do not hold back your hand, and do not want anybody to persuade you, because that will spoil it all. It must be spontaneous. It must come from your own heart, moved only by the Spirit of God, if you wish it to be accepted.

Perhaps I am addressing a young man who has been for years a member of the church, and it is crossing his mind, "What shall I do to show my love?" and it is his ambition to be a missionary in a distant land. Keep not yourself back, my dear young brother. Should it rend a fond connection or cost you your life, give Jesus such proof of your love as His Spirit suggests to you. Or is it that you ought to speak to people about their souls? The Lord will throw somebody in your way. Give a proof of your love by a holy bravery, and speak right out for Jesus Christ, and do not be ashamed. The Lord invites you to a closer fellowship with Himself, to come higher up the mount of God, and to be more thoroughly consecrated. Then show Him the proof of your love.

I leave this with you. If you love Him, show it. If you do not love Him, tremble. I will not repeat what the Scripture says, as though it came from myself, but I would have you recollect it. Paul says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha"—cursed with a curse at the coming of Christ. So it must be if you love not Christ.

Oh! if you do love Him, be inventive. Think of a new thing that nobody else ever did for Jesus. Strike out a fresh path. Deny yourselves comforts to have the comfort of proving your love, as His Spirit shall guide and help you, and to His name be praise evermore. Amen and Amen.

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